



# News Release

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**Arizona Ecological Services Field Office**

**[www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/)**

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## **COMMENTS SOUGHT ON ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL HABITAT FOR TWO RARE SOUTHWEST FISHES**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced the re-opening of the comment period and availability of a draft economic analysis and draft environmental assessment for its Oct. 27, 2010, [proposal](#) to re-designate critical habitat in New Mexico and Arizona for the federally threatened spikedace and loach minnow.

The draft economic analysis estimates the potential impacts of the proposed critical habitat designation to be between \$2.2 million and \$8.8 million over the next 20 years. The draft environmental assessment broadly evaluates the effects of the proposed critical habitat designation.

The Service will hold a public hearing on the proposal, draft economic analysis, and draft environmental assessment, on Oct. 17, 2011, at the Apache Gold Convention Center (Geronimo Room), located five miles east of Globe, Ariz. on Highway 70. An informational session will be held from 3 to 4:30 p.m. followed by a public hearing from 6:30 to 8 p.m. for receiving oral comments. Written comments can be submitted to the Service through Nov. 3, 2011.

The Service initially proposed to designate a total of 796 miles of rivers and streams and their flood plains in New Mexico and Arizona as critical habitat for the two species. At this time, an additional 14.2 miles of the San Francisco River and 19.5 miles of Bear Creek in New Mexico, are being proposed for loach minnow, bringing the total mileage to 830 river miles. Both areas are occupied by loach minnow.

Areas proposed as critical habitat for the spikedace and loach minnow are essential to the conservation of the species and include streams and rivers typically less than three feet deep with perennial flows. Eight critical habitat units are proposed in Apache, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Navajo, Pima, Pinal, and Yavapai counties in Arizona and Catron, Grant, and Hidalgo counties in New Mexico. The proposed units occur on portions of the Verde, Salt, San Pedro, Gila, San Francisco and Blue rivers and their tributaries and Bonita and Eagle creeks. Over 61 percent of the proposed critical habitat occurs on federal lands, with the remaining areas under state (2%), tribal (7%) and private (30%) land ownership.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act that identifies geographic areas containing features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species, and which may require special management considerations or protection. Designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership, establish a refuge or preserve and has no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

Areas identified as essential to the conservation of the spokedace and loach minnow can be excluded from the final critical habitat designation if they are protected by approved Habitat Conservation Plans or other management plans or for economic reasons if the exclusions would not result in the extinction of the species.

In addition to seeking comments on the critical habitat proposal, the Service is also seeking input on the proposed reclassification of both species, from threatened to endangered, recognizing that they are in danger of extinction. An 'endangered' species is one that is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A 'threatened' species is one that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. However, the draft economic analysis and draft environmental assessment are limited to the effects of critical habitat designation; neither addresses the uplisting.

The spokedace is silver-sided and the loach minnow is olive-colored (males are brilliantly colored during spawning) with upward-directed eyes. Both the spokedace and loach minnow are fewer than three inches long and require perennial streams, where they inhabit shallow water with moderate to swift currents. Both are threatened by habitat destruction and introduction of nonnative aquatic species that compete with them. Due to these threats, the spokedace's present range is approximately 10 percent or less of its historical range and the loach minnow occupies 15 to 20 percent of its historical range. Both fishes have been protected as threatened species under the ESA since 1986.

Comments on the proposed critical habitat, the draft economic analysis, the draft environmental assessment, and the proposed uplisting should be submitted by Nov. 3, 2011. These documents and other information about the spokedace and loach minnow are available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/>, or by contacting the Service's Arizona Ecological Service Office at (602) 242-0210. Comments can be submitted electronically via the Federal eRulemaking Portal at: <http://www.regulations.gov>, or can be mailed or hand delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS-R2-ES-2010-0072; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222; Arlington, VA 22203.

The health of threatened and endangered species is strongly linked to our own well-being. Millions of Americans depend on habitat that sustains these species – for clean air and water, recreational opportunities and for their livelihoods. By taking action to protect imperiled native fish, wildlife and plants, we can ensure a healthy future for our community and protect treasured landscapes for future generations.

*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.*

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Note to editors:

Photo support is available by contacting Jeff Humphrey (602-242-0210) or on the Internet at: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Fish.htm>